

NEW YORK TIMES, 9 (1967)

The Antimissile Danger

President Johnson's effort to persuade the Soviet Union to halt deployment of an antiballistic missile (ABM) system is in the interest of both countries and all the world. A new nuclear arms race would foreclose disarmament efforts for many years. It would be illusory as a route to security, for any defense system can be penetrated or saturated. In upsetting the stability of the present nuclear balance, it could revive the cold war and heighten the danger of a clash through miscalculation.

Moreover, intensified nuclear rivalry would be even more expensive in human than in financial terms. Its cost—ultimately \$40 billion—would not merely compete with social needs in both countries. It would start civilization moving underground for protection against the overhead nuclear explosions on which ABM defenses rely.

Will Moscow accept the logic of a moratorium? High-level soundings to date have been inconclusive. Soviet officials have indicated a willingness to discuss a "freeze" on ABM deployment, but it is too early to judge whether they are interested in heading off the new arms race altogether. Until now, Russia's new leaders have pursued an ambivalent policy.

Despite friction over Vietnam, Moscow has sought some measure of *détente* with the United States. Agreements recently have been reached on a space pact and commercial aviation. Progress toward a non-proliferation treaty has been substantial. A consular treaty has been negotiated and is now before the United States Senate, where its ratification is of urgent priority. Moscow has exercised restraint both in critical zones, such as Berlin, and in more distant areas, such as Africa, Latin America and the Indian subcontinent. All this has been accompanied by high-level intimations that Moscow now considers China, rather than the United States, its chief threat. Investment needs in agriculture and in consumer goods industries give Moscow added incentive to end the cold war and to transfer resources from military to peaceful pursuits.

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At the same time, Moscow has been unable to resist the opportunities to divide the Atlantic world that have arisen as a result of Vietnam and the policies of General de Gaulle. And, despite past American suggestions of a missile freeze and American restraint in deferring production of ABM systems, the Soviet Union has initiated deployment of ABM defenses.

This deployment, so far, seems to be limited. There are quite divergent intelligence interpretations of just what the Soviet Union has done and is doing in this area of activity; but some American officials estimate that Russia has spent \$4-to \$5 billion on ABM development and deployment to date. The U.S. has spent \$2 billion plus for the Nike X missile defense system.

The facts thus suggest that traditional Soviet defense-mindedness and pressure by Soviet military men have induced Russia's new leadership to initiate some ABM steps. What remains obscure, however, are the decisions that have been made about further deployment. There is little evidence as yet that Moscow is setting out to reverse the strategic balance and achieve nuclear superiority over the U.S., although an effort to come closer to parity cannot be ruled out.

In these circumstances, President Johnson's response to Russia's ABM deployment has been sound. Development of American ABM's is being pursued vigorously, but decisions on production and deployment are being deferred. The long "diplomacy versus deployment" debate in Washington has been resolved in favor of a diplomatic effort for a moratorium.

Meanwhile, the United States is pressing ahead with offensive missiles designed to penetrate or saturate Russia's new antimissile defenses. This approach lets Moscow know that the United States prefers to opt for arms control and *détente* rather than renewed arms competition and cold war.

Should Moscow fail to respond adequately, there will still be plenty of time to study intermediate measures. What is important for Americans now is to support the course of restraint and peace.